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THE LATE MR. F. FADMANATHA MENON

HISTORY OF KERALA.

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HISTORY OF KERALA.

A HISTORY OF KERALA.

WRITTEN, IN THE FORM OF

NOTES ON VISSCHER'S LETTERS FROM MALABAR,

BY

K. P. PADMANABHA MENON, B.A., B.L., M.R.A.S.,

*Author of the History of Cochin,
and of several Papers connected with the early History of Kerala,
Vakil of the High Courts of Madras & of Travancore
and of the Chief Court of Cochin,*

AND EDITED BY

SAHITHYAKUSALAN

T. K. KRISHNA MENON, B. A.,

*Formerly, a Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, and of the Societies of
Arts and of Authors, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.
Kunhambu Nambiyar Prizeman for some time, an Examiner for
Malayalam to the Universities of Madras, Benares and Hydera-
bad. A Member of the Board of Studies for Malayalam. A
quondam Editor of Vidyarthi. A co-Editor of the
Science Primers Series in Malayalam. Editor of Books
for Malabar Baijans. The Author & Editor of
several works in Malayalam. A Member of
the Indian Women's University, and
a Sadasya of Visva-Bharathi,
&c.*

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PUNAKULAM

DEDICATION

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TO



MR. K. J. TADMAN APHA MEBNON

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FOREWORD

BY THE EDITOR



Mr. K. P. Paḍmañābha Mēnōn (1857—1919), the author of these 'Notes', came of an ancient and respected Nāyar family. His mother, Śrīmaṭi Pārvaṭi Amma, had a very generous heart and a religious turn of mind. Mr. Paḍmañābha Mēnōn was greatly devoted to her, and dedicated to her his monumental *History of Cochin*. His father, Mr. P. Śaṃkuṇṇi Mēnōn, rose from the humble estate of a petty writer to the proud position of the Senior Dewan Peishkar in the model State of Ṭrāvancōre; and 'Ruler after Ruler, Dewan after Dewan, and Resident after Resident praised and petted him' not alone for the diligent discharge of his official duties under trying conditions, but also 'for services unselfishly rendered in various walks of life'. Rājā Sir T. Mādhava Rāo, with whom Mr. Śaṃkuṇṇi Mēnōn had to enter the lists many a time, entertained the highest regard for him; and, when he retired from the Prime Ministership of Ṭrāvancōre, presented Mr. Mēnōn with a memento, and referred in graceful terms to 'his patriotic devotion to his adopted country' and, in particular, to 'the freedom and independence' with which he had always submitted his counsels to his sovereign. "His *History of Travancore* is the only connected, complete and authoritative work on the subject that we possess at the present day, even after so many decades of research, and it is an added testimony to the capaciousness of his genius that he should have found time in the midst of his arduous official work to collect the materials for it and to write it."

Mr. Paḍmañābha Mēnōn was the last of the three children born to this couple; and heredity bestowed

on the son in full measure the admirable qualities of his parents.

His career as a student was smooth and sunny, promising and successful. His masters and professors always spoke in terms of praise of his ability, industry and general good conduct. He attained considerable proficiency in English and Malayālam, History and Law. After his graduation in law, he served his apprenticeship under Sir H. H. Sheppard, who was then the Advocate-General to the Government of Madras, and who afterwards became a Judge of the Madras High Court and then the Legal Advisor to the Secretary of State for India. Before he settled down in life, he went on an extensive all-India tour which served to widen his intellectual horizon and to put, as it were, the finishing touches to his education at school and college. And, then, to be with his mother in her old age, and to enable him to look after her affairs, he settled down, in 1885, at Erṇākulaṃ to practise before the Appeal Court of the Cochin State. With his deep legal erudition and general culture, his patient study of cases and his warm but calm and courtly advocacy, his accessibility and his affable though dignified manners, he easily won the confidence of an increasing number of liberal and respectable clients. But he set his face against unnecessary litigation, and had no partiality for rich parties whose payments were problematical. He soon topped the profession, and, what is more commendable, also began to lead public opinion in Cochin. The people of Cochin were, therefore, very sorry to let him go when, in 1899, he left Erṇākulaṃ for Tri-vāṇṭuṃ, where he thought he could find a wider field for his activities and better facilities for carrying on his researches into the early history of Kēraḷa, a subject on which he had set his heart for a long time. On that occasion, he was presented with an address by the prominent citizens of the State, including Dewan Gōvinḍa Mēnōn and Pāliyaṭṭ Valiya Achhan, the premier

noble of the State. Let me quote a few sentences from that document :

" Allow us to take advantage of this occasion to convey to you our feelings of extreme sorrow at your separation from us, and also of our appreciation of the several sterling qualities by which you have not merely distinguished yourself as the head of your profession here, but also made yourself alike dear to us all in your private capacity as well. * * * . You have now rightly come to occupy the first and foremost position amongst them. Your sound knowledge of law, your independence and honesty, above all your perseverance and thoroughness in the discharge of your duties cannot but furnish an example worthy of imitation not merely by those practising along with you, but by every student of law aspiring to rise and distinguish in the profession. Not less exemplary has been your conduct all along as a true, loyal and public-spirited citizen. * * * . Your readiness and capacity to give sound and sensible advice in matters public and professional have been taken advantage of not merely by your large clientele, your numerous friends and the helpless poor, but also by the Darbar which has chosen you as a member of its Legislative Committee."

Equally pertinent are the remarks contained in the address which, in 1917, the Eṭṭākūḷam Bar Association presented to him on the completion of his sixtieth year.

" In so doing, it is tempted to look back on the long vista of your past life of supreme usefulness, and to hold up your many independence, many-sided scholarship, the almost religious fervour with which you maintained the high traditions of the bar, the purity and greatness of your character, and the enthusiasm you have displayed in legal and historical researches as models of imitation for the present generation and for generations yet to come."

These are not conventional platitudes pressed out of servile flatterers, but the grateful offerings of reverential appreciation spontaneously paid to him by individuals, well-known and independent.

But I am anticipating incidents.

At Tṭivāṇṭṭum too, he had very good practice ; the Judges also were pleased with his dignified address, his 'complete mastery' over his cases and his 'lucid

presentation' which, they said, 'betokened superior attainments in law, and hard and patient labour in the preparation of his cases.' The Government of Tā-vancōre recognised his ability by nominating him as a non-official member of its Legislative Council, and the public by electing him as one of the members of the Marumakkattāyaṁ Committee, appointed to consider important changes in the law and custom that affected the Nāyars.

The memorandum that he prepared on the various questions referred to that Committee is, in the opinion of competent critics, a masterpiece. It contains a critical examination of the origin of the Marumakkattāyaṁ system, an accurate account of the existing state of Malayāli society and practical suggestions for reforming it, so as to satisfy the growing needs of the time. When a piece of similar legislation was found necessary in Cochin, its Government appointed Mr. Mēnōn as one of the members of the Committee whose labours resulted in the passing of the 'Nāyar Regulation' in the State. His report is a learned treatise on the social conditions of the Nāyars, and an effective and convincing reply to those who opposed all legislative attempts to reform them, and particularly on the lines suggested by that Committee.

It should have been stated before this that, in 1902, domestic affairs, considerations of health and repeated calls from old clients forced Mr. Mēnōn to come back to Cochin, and once again to settle down in Erṇākulam.

He liked his profession; he took to it seriously; he did not flirt with Law like a dilettante, nor did he try to win her favours with the mere fading glories of a gown; but he courted that 'jealous mistress' like a devout votary, gained her good graces and succeeded in keeping them to the last day of his life. The arduous struggle, the blows and bruises he took in good part,

and spoke with pride of the ties of comradeship at the bar which were rarely found in other walks of life. He always stood for the traditions and the dignity of his profession. On a memorable occasion, when he had to espouse the cause of a poor client against persons in position, the special First Class Magistrate not only convicted his party, but passed certain adverse remarks on the conduct of the counsel. The Sessions Judge upheld the conviction, and did not question the propriety of the irrelevant remarks of the Magistrate; but a Full Bench of the Appeal Court acquitted the accused and completely exculpated the lawyer from the charge of professional misconduct. Being a member of the High Court Bar of Madras, Mr. Mēnōn placed all the papers, together with the written arguments he had prepared for the Appeal Court, before Sir Arnold White, the Advocate-General, who afterwards became the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. Sir White remarked that 'the written argument showed great ability and erudition', and expressed his opinion that there was 'no foundation or justification for the charges', and said that the Magistrate committed 'a serious error of judgment in taking upon himself to rebuke Mr. P. Mēnōn in connection with his conduct.' 'On the facts of the case as disclosed on the record, one fails to see how any impartial tribunal dealing with the question of alleged misconduct could come to any other conclusion than that which was arrived at by the Judges of the Appeal Court.'

This question was fought out with no malice, at least on the side of Mr. Paḍmañābha Mēnōn. 'He was never wrath except with wrong'. And he was indignant only with an exertion when actuated by a sense of duty. It was in a spirit of charity that he always judged his fellows. His was no sunless creed. He was a deeply religious man. That he was generous, that he had a rare feel for his fellows will be seen from the numerous liberal benefactor; he

made in his last will and testament to temples, asylums, watersheds, educational institutions and to the Bar Association. Special reference must be made at least to one of these gifts. It is the handsome endowment, which now amounts to Rs. 17,200, in favour of the Madras University to encourage post-graduate research work in the History of Ancient India. Here we find the man who not only dwells on the past but also 'reaches a hand through time' into the future.

President Wilson once remarked that "the world never needed lawyers who are also statesmen more than it needs them now." True; and it is so not only in America but also in every part of the civilised world. And in this small State of Cochin, Mr. Mēnōn has considerably helped 'to swell that common tide, on the force and set of whose currents depend the prosperous voyaging of humanity'. On every page of his *History of Cochin* will be seen the temper and the vision of the seer who wants his countrymen to read the past to benefit the present and the future. Of this book, H. H. Kēraḷa Varma, the late Valiya Kōil Ṭampurān, a great scholar, poet and politician wrote in these appreciative terms:

"The work is of absorbing interest, of immense educative value, and unique in the annals of Malayalam Literature. You have laid all available resources under contribution, and produced a colossal work which does the highest credit to your task, culture, judgment and perseverance. The major portion of the information contained in it is thoroughly new in the sense that it has hitherto been a sealed book even to the student of history. What prodigious industry you must have brought to bear on this self-imposed task of yours, the world will appreciate, though it can never adequately gauge. I hope that this great work will be preserved as an invaluable treasure in every household."

Thus it will be seen that Mr. Paḍmañābha Mēnōn was not only a lawyer and statesman, but also a scholar and historian. Lord Bryce remarks that "for the highest sort of historical work, four gifts are needed: unwearied diligence in investigation, a penetratinḡ